CHAPTER XVI

RELIGION

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

IN connection with the chapters on history we have already re* hearsed the main outlines of the development of religion in China. We have seen that the nature of the earliest religion of the Chinese is in dispute. There are those who contend that it was monotheism and that it was later corrupted by polytheism and by the worship of ancestors and of spirits residing in various natural objects. Others—and this is the present tendency—believe that the theistic elements in some of the ancient literary remains were late accretions and that the primitive faith was probably a mixture of animism, including the worship of ancestors, and of reverence for forces and objects of nature, such as Heaven and Earth and some of the heavenly bodies, whose cooperation was regarded as necessary to the well-being of man.

Whatever Chinese religion may have been in its primitive stages, its main outlines in the latter part of the Chou are fairly discernible. There were ceremonies in honor of ancestors. Spirits of varying degrees of potency were believed to reside in many natural objects—such as mountains and rivers—and to demand reverence. Some of the stars, notably those in Ursa Major, were highly esteemed. Heaven and Earth, particularly the former, were held in great veneration and sacrifices were offered to them. One Power was regarded with such awe and to it were ascribed such attributes of personality that a type of theism

may be said to have existed. This Power was denominated either *Tien* (Heaven) or *Shang Ti* (the Supreme Ruler or the Ruler Above). The two terms probably had separate origins and at one time different meanings, but by the latter part of the Chou they had all but coalesced and were declared by some to be identical in the object designated. This theism, of course, was not monotheism in the